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NUMBER ONE

WILD BIRDS

BY

DAN TOTHEROH

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WILD BIRDS

A Play in Three Acts

By Dan Totheroh

First Produced in
Wheeler Hall, University of California
March 25, 1922
Under the direction of Irving Pichel

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INTRODUCTION

There are several obvious statements that may be made about the drama. It is an art form of the highest potentialities. Two great literatures—Greek and English—find the consummation of their achievement in plays. It is preeminently the social form of art. No other aspect of art has so direct an appeal to large masses of men—indeed, in a very real sense, it is a group product, a mass performance. And finally, the English drama was until recently, and largely remains, corrupt and corrupting.

This decay of a great form of social art, a decay which specially characterized the nineteenth century in England and America, was implicit in the very traditions of the drama. These were both the highest and the lowest conceivable. The greatest men might write plays,—in fact, had demonstrably done so. Had not Julius Caesar written a tragedy, mercifully suppressed by his heir and successor? But only the lowest elements of human society produced plays. Acting, and the management of scenes meant the application of one's bodily activities to the amusement of others. That seemed a human degradation and possible only to men already degraded. And the lower tradition triumphed. It is the producer who must in the nature of things become the chief dramatist. Great writers are rare but the public will have its plays week in and week out. So the

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man that performed parts or made others do so, had to write himself parts to perform.

It became a sorry enough business. What could he do but repeat the parts that he remembered had aroused applause, multiply situations that had been accepted, and, knowing that public interest varies, treat the variations as purely capricious and the theatre as an amusing form of gambling? And the result was that several generations of English speaking playgoers dulled their sensibilities and imperilled their artistic souls by a dramatic literature of which the best was, let us say, Robertson's Caste, and the worst was quite too bad to mention.

What has arrested the process of decay? The coming of a great dramatic genius could have done so. After all, there was a Shakespeare. Perhaps Mr. Shaw believes that a great dramatic genius did come to the English stage in the 1890's. But apparently something better and more promising happened.

The production of plays had ceased to be a contaminating craft and had become a lucrative trade,—a transformation that did little for its moral or artistic growth—and, at last, here and there, gentlemen, first in England, then in America, made the experiment of treating this most ancient, most social and perhaps loftiest of the arts, as though it possessed an artistic basis and served an artistic end. That is to say, they presented plays with avowed indifference to any other result than the production of something as fine as they could make it. If the public was entertained, that was good. If the pro-

ducer was enriched, that was not to be despised. But titillating public taste, especially a bad public taste, was not part of their program. In other words, the evil tradition that made an actor a mountebank and a producer a purveyor of pleasures, was to be deliberately disregarded.

All that these men needed was material. They wanted good plays. And the extraordinary thing was that they found them. Translation and imitation gave them some. Invention gave them more. No one of these plays, it may be admitted, has quite the quality of Hamlet or King Oedipus. But ten fairly good plays are written now for one that was written thirty years ago and the result is due to the movement that began in the 90's in England, the movement to free the theatre from the tradition which makes it the substitute for the mediaeval cock-pit, and to reaffirm the tradition that makes it the great synthetic art through which the people in a mass can receive the highest emotional exaltation.

We are far indeed from having reached that goal. In the minds of many the theatre is still primarily a purveyor of gratifications, an amusement parlor. The movement to remedy this is slow and its success problematic. But it is precisely this movement that the Greek Theatre of the University of California was designed to forward. Seconding the work of the Little Theatres throughout the country, the Greek Theatre has sought during each academic term to present plays of varying types and sources; basing its selection, in every instance, on the play's merit. The response of the audiences

has been most gratifying. It is evident that the public wishes to see good plays and is only prevented from attending them by the fact that commercial producers rarely produce them.

However, the Greek Theatre has a function of a more special character. Drama, as an article of commerce, has gone through the regular stages of business development. Hucksters became traders, traders became companies and companies became syndicates. The wrong tradition, the evil tradition of the stage, became capitalized, and standardized and centralized. Not the least valuable part of the movement represented by the Little Theatres is the breach it seeks to make in this entrenched abuse. Art is essentially individual, and a group art such as the drama, is not an exception. Here, however, it is the individual group that is the unit. If in every part of the country, groups are at work freely unfolding themselves under local conditions, giving the fullest scope to the powers of their members, an art will be made possible that will be the resultant of the many individual tendencies undoubtedly existing.

That is what the Greek Theatre would like to effect. Its actual production is the cooperative result of a group. More and more that group will become coextensive with the state, whose agency the Greek Theatre is. But while that lies in the future, the cooperation of the whole state can be elicited at once in at least one respect.

The Greek Theatre needs plays. It needs good plays. It will take them wherever it can get them.

It may go to China for some, to Berlin for others, to Birmingham or Greenwich Village for still others. And it would like to make some for itself. It would like by its organization to give a scope for those who in California have the power to create dramas.

The first step in that direction was the Prize Competition organized last year in which more than eighty plays were submitted. The successful play is the one which opens this series, WILD BIRDS, by Mr. Dan Totheroh, to be produced in Wheeler Hall at the University of California campus, in Berkeley.

But prize plays and their production form only the first step. The second step is the organization of the series of which this is the first number. Only one play can receive a prize, but many may have merits that entitle them to a higher recognition than that of having honorably competed. The Greek Theatre wishes for itself and for those other dramatic agencies fighting the good fight throughout the country, to render available whatever of specialized dramatic ability the State of California possesses. With or without competitions, it is intended to publish plays written by residents of the state for production by the Greek Theatre organization. Not all such plays will be presented, but their publication will, it is trusted, be in itself a valuable achievement and stimulate further production.

EDITORIAL BOARD
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CHARACTERS

JOHN SLAG, *a Homesteader.*
MRS. SLAG, *his wife.*
CORIE SLAG, *their daughter.*
MAZIE.
ADAM LARSEN.
MILT POLLARD.
SANDY ROBERTS.
ESTHEY, *his daughter.*
GEORGE MARSHALL.
A TRAMP.
THE VOICE OF THE PREACHER.

SCENES

ACT 1.

SCENE 1—Before the Slag homestead on prairie land in the Middle-West. Early Spring.
SCENE 2—The same. A week later. The evening of Corie Slag's marriage to Milt Pollard.

ACT 2.

SCENE 1—The same—about a month and a half later. Spring at the full.
SCENE 2—Outside the tent of the Evangelical Camp Meeting. That evening.
SCENE 3—Far out on the Prairie. Later that night.

ACT 3.

SCENE 1—The same as Acts 1 and 2. Five months later. Late Fall.
SCENE 2—Adam's room in the attic, a little before dawn, the next morning.
SCENE 3—The outside of the house again. About ten minutes later. Dawn.

ACT 1.

SCENE 1.

SCENE 1—*A clearing before the* SLAG *homestead, on prairie land in the Middle-West. The house is right, just the very front of it in view, a long, low building crudely constructed, the cracks between the rough boards plastered with mud. A snake fence runs across the back of the stage, beyond which is a winding road and beyond that great stretches of prairie land, now delicately tinted with the green of early Spring. There are three or four benches before the house and a barrel rocker.*

It is about four o'clock in the afternoon. The air, which has been warmed by the first real day of sun after a long, hard winter, is turning cold again.

CORIE SLAG, *a thin, irritable looking girl with scraggly blond hair, is leaning on the snake fence looking up the road, left. She wears a print dress and her feet are bare.*

MRS. SLAG *enters from the house carrying a wooden water bucket. She is a lank, worn woman with stooped shoulders and thin gray hair.* CORIE *resembles her, having the same straight, thin-lipped mouth and pale blue eyes, a milky blue.*

MRS. SLAG (*going toward the well, which is off stage, left*):

What air you lookin' at, Corie?

CORIE:

I thought that might be Milt comin'.

MRS. SLAG (*changing her direction and coming to the fence*):

It can't be Milt this time of day. He couldn't leave his plowin'. Days like this air too scarce. (*looking up the road*) No, that hain't him. Too tall fer him. Wonder who it air?

CORIE:

He air walkin' mad-like with his arms swingin'.

MRS. SLAG (*shading her eyes with her hands*):

I do believe it air the new hired man. What's he stopped plowin' so early fer? It hain't like John to be lettin' him stop so early.

CORIE:

Maybe somethin's happened.

MRS. SLAG:

Maybe so. (*raising her hand and calling*): Hey, George Marshall, what's happened?

(*There is no reply from the road.*)

CORIE:

He's a queer one. I didn't like him when paw hired him. You can't tell about these folks that come in off the road.

MRS. SLAG:

I didn't take to him neither. I told John I didn't. He had a way of lookin' sharp with his eyes that I didn't like. It was like he was tryin' to find things out about you.

CORIE:

He was talkin' early this mornin' to Mazie. I heard him when I was gettin' dressed. Mazie was washin' the milk buckets at the well an' between the swishin' of water, I could hear him

talkin' an' her answerin' back in that soft, deceivin' way of hers.

MRS. SLAG:

It's his kind Mazie draws to her like flies after syrup drip. They kinda know what she air 'fore we tell 'em. Hey, George Marshall, what's happened?

(*Enter George Marshall, a tall, plain-faced man with keen gray eyes. He is about forty-five, an outdoor-man, tanned and strong.*)

GEORGE MARSHALL (*calmly*):

Nothin' has happened. I air quittin', that's all.

MRS. SLAG:

What fer?

GEORGE MARSHALL:

That man of your'n air a devil. I can't work with him. I air a peaceful man, Mrs. Slag. I go about the country workin' here an' thar—plowin', sowin', harvestin'—I like wanderin'—seein' country an' folks—I like people—but I cannot stand your man, Mrs. Slag. He air a hard man with hard ways. He air a driver of men. (*going toward the house*) I air goin' to git my things from John Slag's attic an' then I air hittin' the road agin.

MRS. SLAG:

You hain't treatin' John Slag right. He's got to git that plowin' done right off an' that seed in while these nice days air lastin'.

GEORGE MARSHALL:

I hev never left a man in the lurch before. I hev got a clean record all through the Middle-

West with farmers an' homesteaders but John Slag can't raise the hoss whip agin me an' call my mother a name like he did. (*On the steps of the house*) Mrs. Slag, your man should hev lived in the days before the Civil War an' owned slaves. Then he could hev beaten 'em whenever he wanted an' they couldn't hev quit him, like me.

MRS. SLAG (*blood flushing her face*):

You air an insultin' man, George Marshall!

CORIE (*hatefully*):

I wish paw *had* hit you with the hoss whip!

GEORGE MARSHALL (*smiling gently*):

I hev put my foot inter a nest of rattlers. Now I must git out quick before I git bitten.

(*He exits inside the house.*)

MRS. SLAG (*lifting up the bucket*):

What will John do now fer help?

CORIE (*shrugging her shoulders*):

Oh, somebody else will come along.

MRS. SLAG (*doubtfully*):

Labor air scarce this year. Men air goin' inter the cities to work. That's what the "Gazette" says.

CORIE:

Waal, thar's one thing sartain. *I* hain't goin' to help with the plowin' like I did once. I hain't strong enough an' besides Milt don't want me to be gettin' all stooped over. He wants a wife what he kin be proud of to show 'round an' take to fairs, tent meetin's an' places.

MRS. SLAG (*exiting toward the well*):

Of course, Corie, your paw an' me wouldn't think of sich a thing.

CORIE:

Mazie air strong an' thar hain't nobody marryin' her. (CORIE *giggles at the very idea.*)

MRS. SLAG:

No, I hain't seein' suitors breakin' thar necks to git at her. (*She takes a few steps away*) Now that George Marshall air leavin' thar won't be so much cookin'. Waal, we'll see when John comes. (*She exits*).

CORIE *comes down to a bench and sits there.*)

(*Enter from the rear of the house,* MAZIE. *She is a small, quick-moving girl with masses of black hair that she wears in a thick braid down her back. It is such heavy hair that it seems to tilt her head, raising her little white chin and swelling the soft line of her throat, like the throat of a wild bird that sings. She has a wistful, searching expression in her eyes that are deeply brown and deeply set. Her dress is of coarse brown home-spun and her little feet are bare. Her cheeks are flushed from bending over the stove in the lean-to.*)

MAZIE:

Hello, Corie. The grass air come on the prairie agin. (*She knows that Corie doesn't care about the grass on the prairie, but she* must *talk about the miracle to some one. Inwardly she is bubbling over.*)

CORIE (*not looking at her*):

You better be careful an' don't burn things tonight. Paw air goin' to be ornery.

MAZIE (*taking a little, untrained dance step behind Corie*):

Jist think Corie, I air seventeen now. At least I air pruty near to it. I will be seventeen by the night you air married.

CORIE (*smiling sneeringly*):

How do you know *how* old you air?

MAZIE:

I asked Aunt Martie. She said I would be seventeen by next week.

CORIE:

Yes, but nobody knows *really* how old you air. How kin anybody be sure when your maw air dead long time ago an' you never had no father?

MAZIE (*simply*):

I did have a father—but he didn't want me.

CORIE:

Who's been tellin' you things?

MAZIE:

Nobody. I jest figgered it out. I air seventeen now, Corie, an' I air beginnin' to understand things. All by myself I air beginnin' to understand things.

CORIE (*irritably*):

You don't know what you're talkin' about. Go back inter the house or I'll tell maw.

MAZIE:

I think I'll git to know lots of things now that Mr. Marshall air livin' here. He will tell me

things that would take me a long time to figger out by myself.

CORIE (*laughing*):

He's up in the attic now, gettin' ready to go. Lot's he'll be tellin' you.

MAZIE (*her face falling*):

Why air he leavin'?

CORIE:

Paw fired him. He air no good.

MAZIE:

I air sorry. (*She blinks back tears.*)

CORIE:

What air you cryin' about? You never spoke to him afore this mornin'. I heard you while you was washin' the milk buckets.

MAZIE:

I never spoke to him afore this mornin'—but it air like I hev known him a long, long time.

CORIE (*rising*):

You air crazy. (*She goes to the fence and looks up the road*). Don't you wish you was goin' to meet a fine lover like Milt at sundown by the creek willers an' go walkin' with him? (*She struts away up the road, her hands indolently on her lean hips.*)

(GEORGE MARSHALL *re-enters from the house carrying a battered suitcase.*)

GEORGE MARSHALL (*tenderly*):

Waal, you hev come out of the kitchen to say goodbye to me, hev you?

MAZIE:

I did not know you was goin' till Corie told me.

GEORGE MARSHALL:

I air glad we hev had one talk together anyhow. I'll remember the little wild bird I hev found—

MAZIE (*thrilled*):

Little wild bird! Me?

GEORGE MARSHALL:

Yes. Little wild bird—trapped. Sometime I might come back an' open the trap. What do you say?

MAZIE (*going to him*):

Air you really meanin' that?

GEORGE MARSHALL (*taking her hand*):

Believe in me, Mazie. An' now goodbye.

(*He stoops and kisses her brow, first smoothing back the heavy hair.*)

MAZIE:

I will watch fer your face in the well—among the stars. Once I saw my mother's face. It was white. It only stayed a minute. I will watch fer your face.

GEORGE MARSHALL:

What well do you mean, Mazie?

MAZIE (*pointing off left*):

Over thar, underneath the big tree. It air round like the world is. I like to look down it. It air black, most of the time, but at night I hev seen stars in it. . . .

GEORGE MARSHALL:

If you kin find my face thar among the stars an' whar your mother's face was, I would be glad. Walk as fer as the willers with me, Mazie.

(*He takes her hand and they exit,* MAZIE *walking*

with her head back, looking at him.)

(*Enter* MRS. SLAG *carrying the wooden water bucket full of greens. With her is* SANDY ROBERTS, *an eccentric old neighbor with disheveled white hair and small brown eyes with a half-mad glint in them.*)

MRS. SLAG:

An' I was sayin', Sandy, that he air quittin'. By now he must be gone.

SANDY:

An' the locust come down that night, Mrs. Slag, an' et every blade of corn in them ten acres jest clean as a whistle. I remember gettin' up that mornin' an' lookin' out whar thar was miles of green at sundown—an' at sunup thar was nothin'.

MRS. SLAG (*impatiently*):

I've heard you tell about them locust fifty times, Sandy.

SANDY:

But here's a new one. I air rememberin' the time when I was no higher'n that (*indicating with his hand*) when the winter on these prairies was so hard that the wolves come down to the houses from the hills an' tried to tear away the logs to git at us an' eat us. No wonder folks sez I'm crazy when all the time I'm rememberin' sich things an' kin hear wolves howlin' at night.

MRS. SLAG:

You hev tol' that story, too, a thousand times. You better git home to Esthey. I hev lots to do. I hain't got no time to listen to yer crazy notions. (*She moves impatiently toward the house.*)

(*Enter, on the road,* ESTHEY KENYON, *his daughter, a woman about thirty-five, gaunt and work-worn.*)

ESTHEY:

Oh, thar you air! I've been huntin' all over fer you paw. You've got to stop this runnin' away! Has he been botherin' you, Mrs. Slag?

MRS. SLAG:

Waal, I don't usually listen to him half the time but he *did* git on my nerves today cause our'n new hired man jest quit us an' I'm worried to know what John's goin' to do fer help.

ESTHEY:

Was that him I jest passed on the road walkin' with Mazie?

MRS. SLAG (*excited*):

Whar was they?

ESTHEY:

Goin' toward the creek road. I met 'em this side of the willers.

MRS. SLAG (*up to the road and looking off left*):

I was skeered o' this! (*Shading her eyes with her hand*) Thar they air, standin' in the road talkin' by the willers. (*Cupping her mouth with her hands.*) Mazie! Mazie! You come on back!

ESTHEY (*going up to her*):

Did he ever hire out to you afore, Mrs. Slag?

MRS. SLAG:

No. Not that I recollect (*making an imperative gesture with her arm*). You hurry now!

ESTHEY:

Seems to me like I've seen him afore. He gave me a kind of start when I looked at him. You

know how it air when you smell a sartain kind of flower, it brings you back to a sartain place, a corner of a back yard whar you played when you war little or a garden walk, or somethin'? Waal, his face brought back to me the corner of the graveyard above Big Rock. I could see a funeral, on a hot day——

MRS. SLAG:

Thar's somethin' I don't like about him an' in a way I'm glad he quit.

ESTHEY:

This funeral was a long time ago. It was the funeral of a young girl who committed suicide. It was afore you come West, Mrs. Slag. Seems to me that hired man of your'n was at that funeral. It was a poor funeral. Thar was no flowers an' thar never was no stone. My, it was a hot day, I remember. Pete an' me was drivin' past in a buggy. We stopped an' watched. If I hain't mistaken this hired man was kneelin' near the fence, pruty far from the grave. Of course, I hain't sure it *was* him. It was so long ago an' he was lots younger, but the eyes was the same.

(*Enter* MAZIE.)

MRS. SLAG:

Take these here greens an' git inter the house!

(MAZIE *silently takes the bucket and exits.*)

SANDY:

He, he, I air rememberin' the time when we crossed the river through the flood, after the snows, an' the hosses went down——

ESTHEY (*taking his arm*):

Come on back now, paw! Sun air most down an' you'll take cold an' then I'll hev to be waitin' on you. Come on now!

SANDY:

No, no! Mrs. Slag wants to hear how the hosses went down—kickin' an' squealin'—

ESTHEY (*pulling at him*):

You come on or I'll lock you up agin in the shed in the dark!

SANDY (*almost screaming*):

No, no, not in the shed agin, Esthey! Not yer ol' paw in the shed agin! Please—please, Esthey! Not in the dark shed!

MRS. SLAG (*laughing*):

Good fer you, Esthey. You've got him skeered all right.

SANDY:

Please, please, little Esthey! Not in the dark shed! Not yer ol' paw in the dark shed!

ESTHEY:

Then you jest come along home! (*exiting with him*) Goodbye, Mrs. Slag. Hope you find a new hand.

MRS. SLAG:

If we don't I don't see how we kin git the seed sowed. Oh, here's John.

(JOHN SLAG, *a great hulk of a man with a scraggly, iron-gray beard and small, cruel eyes, enters by the road, left, carrying a sack of seed over his square shoulders. His heavy brows are drawn*

together in a fearful frown and a huge fist is clenched.)

MRS. SLAG (*going to him*):
What air you goin' to do, John?

JOHN SLAG (*putting down the sack of seed*):
Git somebody else, of course. That damn fool Marshall warn't worth his salt, anyhow.

(ESTHEY, *having paused irresolute, goes to exit.*)

SANDY:
You won't lock me up, will you, Esthey—like a crazy man in a cage! You won't, will you, Esthey?

JOHN SLAG (*gruffly to* MRS. SLAG):
Git that crazy man out of here. I won't stand fer his jabberin'.

ESTHEY (*pulling him away*):
Now you jest come on or I will lock you up! (*They exit.*)

JOHN SLAG:
Supper ready?

MRS. SLAG:
Almost. You air a little early 'count of what's happened. I'll hustle Mazie.

JOHN SLAG (*going toward the house door*):
If nobody turns up I'm goin' to make a trip inter town this week-end an' look over some of them boys in the orphanage. Thar was some younguns when we got Mazie who oughter be big an' strong by now. I'd like to break in one of 'em. He'd belong to me an' he couldn't give me no back talk or nothin'.

(*He exits into the house followed meekly by* MRS. SLAG.)

(CORIE SLAG *and* MILT POLLARD, *a rather short, plain-faced man with prominent gold-filled teeth, enter arm in arm. They pause by the fence.*)

CORIE:

Won't you come in, Milt? Supper was most ready when I come to meet you.

MILT:

No thanks, Corie. I've got some milkin' to do an' maw gits all fidgety if I don't git back by sundown.

CORIE (*pouting*):

Oh, it's allus your maw. I believe you're fonder of her'n than you air of me. (*She turns away from him, her thin mouth tightened into a hard line.*)

MILT:

Now don't git cross, Corie. Maw's pruty helpless with that bad leg of her'n an' I'd be a pruty poor son if I didn't watch out for her. She got that bad leg of her'n from slushin' around in rain an' mud fer me when I was a kid.

CORIE:

She's allus takin' you away from me. A maw hain't got no right to do that. You're a growed man now an' not no kid. (*Turning back to him.*) When we git married she won't allus be wantin' you, will she, Milt?

MILT:

No, Corie, 'cause we'll be livin' with her fer a spell till I git money enough to build our'n house.

She won't be needin' me so much, havin' you to talk to her, days when I'm out in the fields. She jest gits lonesome sittin' thar all day with her hands in her lap.

CORIE (*putting her arms around* MILT'S *neck*):
Oh, let's not talk about her no more. I love you, Milt! (*She passionately kisses him.*)

(MAZIE *enters from the side of the house carrying the wooden water bucket. She pauses by the house corner looking at the lovers.*)

MILT:
Next week you will be all mine, Corie—every inch of you. (*He kisses her again and again on the mouth.* MAZIE *puts her hand to her breast but does not move. Her eyes become strangely, beautifully misted.*)

CORIE (*breathlessly*):
Every inch of me your'n, Milt.

MILT:
I love you—love you, Corie. (*He breaks from her and stands regarding her for a moment, his lips parted.*) Jest walk a little ways more with me, down as fer as the bean lot. Thar goes the last of the sun.

(*The stage becomes darker. A soft blue light bathes the road and the prairie.* CORIE *and* MILT *exit, right, arm in arm.* MAZIE *goes to the fence. She leans on it and watches the lovers down the road. Then she turns, her eyes still strangely misted, and crosses toward the well to fill the bucket. She exits but re-enters immediately, walking quickly backwards, her hands thrust out*

before her. The bucket she has dropped by th well.)

MAZIE (*talking to someone off-stage*):
Who air you? You skeered me.

(*Enter* ADAM LARSEN, *a well-built boy of eighteen dressed in blue denim trousers, a torn dirty shirt and his feet bare and caked with mud. His face is drawn and streaked with perspiration. His mouth hangs open and he breathes heavily.*)

ADAM:
I was tryin' to git a drink from your well. I hev been runnin' an' I air thirsty. I didn't mean to skeer you.

MAZIE:
I dropped the bucket when I saw you. You kin tie the rope to it an' let it down inter the well. Whar did you come from?

ADAM (*after searching her face for a moment*):
I ran away.

MAZIE:
From home?

ADAM:
No. I ran away from the reform school at Dayson.

MAZIE:
What air a reform school?

ADAM:
It air a place whar they put boys and girls who air bad.

MAZIE:
Air it like an orphanage?

ADAM:

Somethin', I guess. Only at a reform school, everybody air bad.

MAZIE (*in surprise*):

Everybody——bad?

ADAM:

Yes. I ran away yesterday mornin' with another boy. All the others was skeered. Red went one way an' I went the other. He lived South an' my mother lives North. I ran till I thought my heart would stop beatin'. Then I got a ride on a hay wagon. I walked almost all last night. I hev big blisters on the bottom of my feet.

MAZIE:

I air awful sorry. I will git you a drink of water. I was jest after some fer the house when I saw you.

ADAM:

Does your mother an' father live here?

MAZIE:

No. My mother air dead an' my father didn't want me. I was in the St. Vincent home. Mr. Slag came an' got me. I hire out to him.

ADAM (*eagerly*):

Oh, I wonder if he'd hire *me* out?

MAZIE:

You look like you air strong. Mr. Marshall, the hired man, jest quit. Kin you plow?

ADAM:

You bet.

MAZIE:

Then maybe Mr. Slag would take you.

ADAM:

If he knew I was a bad boy would he take me?

MAZIE:

I don't know. I'm goin' to git you some water. You kin hardly talk.

ADAM:

Do you think he would send me back to the reform school if I fessed up an' told him I ran away? Maw allus said it whar wrong to lie but in the reform school we lied all the time.

MAZIE:

I don't think he would send you back. He needs a man so bad who kin plow.

ADAM:

I used to plow at home. Thar was a big field right side of our'n sittin' room winder. Maw used to set at the winder an' watch me. When I would git tired an' stop, she used to come out with a gourd of spring water an' some of her'n little white biscuits on a plate with blue flowers. She would come to me over the piles of dirt steppin' so light an' pruty, balancin' the biscuits an' gourd without spillin' anything.

MAZIE:

Thar! I told you you couldn't talk. You choke right up, you're so thirsty. Set down in a chair an' rest yer feet. They must be sore with blisters. (*She takes a step toward the well.*)

(*Enter* MRS. SLAG *from the house.*)

MRS. SLAG:

Mazie!

MAZIE:
Yes, mam——

MRS. SLAG:
What air you takin' so long about?—(*She sees* ADAM.) Who air you?

ADAM:
My name air Adam Larsen, mam. I air thirsty —an'—an'—

MRS. SLAG (*turning to the house and calling*):
Oh, John! John!

JOHN SLAG (*from inside*):
Waal?

MRS. SLAG:
Come out here, John. (ADAM, *frightened, makes a motion to run away.*) Don't go way. Wait.

(*Enter* JOHN SLAG.)

JOHN SLAG:
Waal? Waal?

MRS. SLAG:
I thought this here boy might be lookin' fer work.

JOHN SLAG (*looking him over as he crosses to him*):
Air you lookin' fer work?

ADAM:
Y-yes, sir.

JOHN SLAG:
What air your name an' whar did you come from?

(ADAM *turns helplessly toward* MAZIE, *then back to* JOHN SLAG.)

ADAM (*searching the big man's cruel face*):
I—I——

JOHN SLAG:

Waal?

ADAM:

I—I—you—won't—I—(*His legs seem to give way under him. He abruptly drops to his knees and buries his face in his hands.*)

JOHN SLAG:

What's the matter with you?

(*The boy's shoulders heave.* MAZIE *stretches out her hand.*)

MRS. SLAG:

He's cryin'. Of all things fer a big boy.

JOHN SLAG (*pulling him up by the shoulder*):

What's the matter with you?

ADAM (*throwing himself on* JOHN SLAG'S *mercy*):

I'm Adam Larsen. I ran away from the reform school at Dayson. Please don't send me back. I kin plow an' I'll work fer you, if you don't send me back. (*His voice breaks.*)

JOHN SLAG (*revelling in the feel of this helpless boy wriggling in his power*):

If you ran away you should be sent back—

ADAM:

Fer God's sake, don't send me back! I'll kill myself—if you send me back! I wasn't bad when they sent me—but I'm bad when I'm thar. If you send me back I'll hang myself like Eddie Smolt did. They found him in the mornin'. I saw him when they cut him down! He was only thirteen. He hung himself. I'll do the same. I know jest how he did it—with a bed sheet. If you send me back—I'll do the same——

JOHN SLAG (*unmoved*):

By the law, I should send you back. It hain't right to keep a boy who has run away from an institution. Yes, by right, I should send you back——

ADAM (*almost shrieking*):

If you do—I'll hang myself—like Eddie Smolt!

(MAZIE *presses the tips of her fingers against her closed eyes.*)

JOHN SLAG:

Whar was you headed fer?

ADAM:

Fer home—to my mother—but it's too fer away. Home's too fer away—Oh, God! God!—(*He throws himself again on the ground.*)

JOHN SLAG:

Git up!

(ADAM *slowly rises.*)

JOHN SLAG:

I'll keep you here an' you kin work fer me. I'll give you a good home if you show you're deservin' of it. You kin hev the hired man's room in the attic—

ADAM:

An'—an' you won't let them take me back if they come fer me?

JOHN SLAG:

Jest let me tend to that (*patting him on the shoulder and at the same time feeling the muscle of his arm*). You air a husky. Yes, I guess you kin plow. Come in the house. We air jest settin' down to supper.

ADAM:

I air mighty hungry an' thirsty—

MRS. SLAG (*going toward the house*):

Hurry with that water, Mazie!

MAZIE:

Yes, mam. (*She starts toward the well.*)

ADAM:

Let me git the water. (MAZIE *pauses.*)

JOHN SLAG:

No, you come in with me. Mazie gits the water.

(MRS. SLAG *exits into the house.*)

ADAM (*to* JOHN SLAG):

It air mighty kind of you to do this, sir. I will show you that I air deservin' of a good home.

JOHN SLAG:

Waal, we'll see. Come on in. We eat early—git to bed early an' git up with the sun.

(JOHN SLAG *and* ADAM *exit into the house.*)

(MAZIE *stands for a moment, motionless, looking after them. Then she suddenly laughs, high and joyously, like a child romping through a flowered field. She whirls about; raises high her arms; tilts back her chin and darts to the well.*)

(THE CURTAIN FALLS)

ACT I

SCENE 2

The same as scene 1. *A week later. The evening of* CORIE SLAG'S *marriage to* MILT POLLARD. *All things are obscured by the shadows of dusk except the front of the stage which is lighted by a lantern in the window of the house.*

ADAM LARSEN *has been standing by the fence looking off across the prairie but he turns and somes down to the lighted place as the curtain rises.*

MRS. SLAG'S *nasal voice is heard inside the house.*

MRS. SLAG:

Corie! Corie! Air you ready?

CORIE:

Almost, maw!

(*There is silence.* ADAM *walks up and down.* MAZIE *comes around the side of the house.*)

ADAM:

Hello, Mazie.

MAZIE (*startled*):

Oh!—Air that you, Adam? I thought you went to bed.

ADAM:

I thought I was awful tired but when I laid down I couldn't sleep so I got up agin.

MAZIE:

They will be goin' soon. Milt's wagon jest pulled up by the willers. I peeked in the winder at Corie. She looked very pruty in her new white dress an' her hair up like this. (*She piles her hair on top of her head.*)

ADAM:

Gee! What a lot of black hair you have, Mazie.

MAZIE:

Sometimes it air too heavy. Once, when I was lookin' in the well it slipped down an' I thought it was goin' to pull me inter the water. (*She laughs.*)

ADAM:

When my mother was a gal she could sit on her hair, it was so long.

MAZIE:

Like a queen!

ADAM:

Yes, like a little queen. Air you really seventeen tonight, Mazie?

MAZIE:

I think I air seventeen, but I hain't sure now.

(*Enter* JOHN SLAG *dressed uncomfortably in a black suit and wearing great, freshly blackened shoes. He is wrapping a knitted muffler about his throat and carries a tall black hat.*)

(ADAM *and* MAZIE *instinctively move closer together.*)

JOHN SLAG:

Adam Larsen, I thought you was in bed?

ADAM:

I did go to bed—but—but—I got up agin. I couldn't sleep.

JOHN SLAG (*advancing on him in a bullying attitude*):

Thar air some trick in the back of your'n head, Adam Larsen. (*He puts a hand on his shoulder. The boy winces.*) Remember, you belong to me! If you try runnin' away like you did from the

reform school, I'll track you down an' beat you within an inch of yer life! If it warn't fer me, them men who come lookin' fer you would hev taken you back to whar you belong. You're mine now an' you'll do everything I say! Understand that? (*His hand closes tightly on the boy's shoulder.* ADAM *digs his upper teeth into his lower lip to keep from crying out.*)

ADAM:

I—I—hain't thinkin' of runnin' away, Mr. Slag. Honest I hain't.

JOHN SLAG (*releasing him*):

Waal, I'm warnin' you, that's all.

(*Enter* MILT POLLARD *by the road, painfully dressed in a black suit of clothes that has been bought by catalogue and shows it. He wears white gloves, carries an umbrella under his arm and a smoky lantern in his hand, and steps cautiously to avoid puddles. He salutes* JOHN SLAG.)

MILT:

Evenin', paw. Air they ready? I left the wagon near the willers. The road air too full of mud holes to git through.

JOHN SLAG (*bellowing into the house*):

Maw! Corie! Milt air here!

MRS. SLAG (*from inside*):

All right, John. Corie! Corie! Milt air here.

CORIE:

Already, maw.

JOHN SLAG (*to* MILT):

It air a lot of damn nonsense goin' clear inter town fer a fool weddin' when we could hev had

it here or at yer house, Milt, jest as well. Look at all the money I hev spent already, an' more that I hev to spend afore we git through with it. That dinner at the hotel afterwards air plumb crazy.

MILT:

I don't care about so much fuss but Corie, bein' a woman, wanted things pruty. It's natural fer a woman to want some dog.

JOHN SLAG:

It air a waste of money, an' time an' everything. Corie thinks I hev saved up money but I air a poor man, Milt Pollard. Allus remember that! I air a poor man!

(*Enter* CORIE *and* MRS. SLAG. CORIE *wears a big cloak over a stiffly starched white dress that has much lace looped on the sleeves and around the bottom of the skirt. Excitement has flushed her thin face and burns in her eyes. She is almost pretty.* MRS. SLAG *wears a drab colored jacket and skirt, the jacket having leg-of-mutton sleeves and the skirt is wide and ruffled and trails on the ground. She lifts it high to keep it out of the dirt. She also carries an umbrella.*)

CORIE (*going to* MILT):

Milt, I air sorry if I hev kept you waitin'.

MILT:

I jest came. My, you look pruty, Corie. (*He takes her hand.*)

MRS. SLAG:

Mazie, you git inter the house. Finish up them dishes an' then you go straight to bed.

(MAZIE *silently exits behind the house.*)

MRS. SLAG:

John, I thought Adam Larsen was in bed.

JOHN SLAG:

He air goin' right now. (*He makes a brutal motion toward* ADAM. *The boy slinks toward the house.*)

MILT:

Come on, folks.

MRS. SLAG:

Go slow with the lantern, Milt. The road air full of chuck holes.

MILT (*walking ahead,* CORIE *on his arm*):

I air so happy I could sing. Sing with me, Corie. (*Off key he begins singing, "Seeing Nellie Home." As they exit* CORIE *joins in with a thin nasal soprano.*)

JOHN SLAG:

Hell!

(*They exit.*)

(ADAM *stops on the steps of the house and turns about. He listens to the song until it dies away. Frogs sound clearly near the well. A wind rises in the big tree over the well. It stirs* ADAM'S *unmanageable shock of blond hair. He takes a deep breath.*)

(MAZIE *re-enters from the side of the house.*)

MAZIE (*calling softly*):

Adam. Adam. Whar air you?

ADAM (*coming down the step*):

Here I air, Mazie.

MAZIE (*running to him*):

Oh, Adam, ain't it wonderful to be alive on nights like this? Jest think, thar air lots of people who air not born yet an' don't know what a wind feels like—or stars look like—or anything about the grass on the prairie!

ADAM:

Gee, Mazie, you say pruty but funny things. You don't know much of things, do you, Mazie?

MAZIE (*shaking her head*):

No. Nobody will tell me much of things. (*Nearer to him.*) But *you* know things, don't you, Adam?

ADAM:

Yes. I know all kinds of *bad things.*

MAZIE:

You air allus callin' yourself bad. You air not bad, Adam.

ADAM:

Sure I air bad. I warn't when I was home but afterwards I was bad. It air funny when you think of it. They sent me to the reform school to make me good an' instead I got bad!

MAZIE:

Why did they send you to the reform school, Adam?

ADAM:

Because I hit my father with his cane. He fell down an' his head began to bleed. I thought that he was dead. I got skeered an' got to laughin' like a fool. I couldn't stop. They said I was crazy. Then they said, 'No, he is jest bad!'

MAZIE:

Why did you hit him?

ADAM:

Because he took my mother's wrist an' twisted it until she screamed an' fell down on her knees. I heard the bones in her pruty wrist crack. Then I hit him with his cane that I picked up beside his chair. After that, they sent me away.

MAZIE:

That warn't bad to hit him if he took your mother's wrist an' twisted it till the pruty bones cracked. Oh!

(*She buries her face in her hands.*)

ADAM (*timidly touching her shoulder*):

Don't cry, Mazie. Mazie, please don't cry.

MAZIE:

Your poor little maw. (*She turns and like a child comes into his arms. Awkwardly he holds her. She snuggles closer to him.*)

ADAM:

My mother would like you, Mazie. She allus said she wanted to hev a gal. (*His face goes down into her hair.*)

MAZIE:

Why do you put your face in my hair?

ADAM:

I like to. It feels nice and soft agin my cheek.

MAZIE (*after a pause*):

An' why do your arms hold me so tight?

ADAM:

Mazie—Mazie—

MAZIE (*pulling away and looking at him with wonder*):

You hurt me. An' your voice—

ADAM (*turning away and clenching and unclenching his hands*):

Oh, Mazie—Mazie—

MAZIE:

Why do you say, 'Oh, Mazie—Mazie' like that—way down in your throat? (*She again comes to him.*)

ADAM (*moving away*):

Don't—don't, Mazie. I air bad. You don't know things. Don't—don't—, Mazie—

(*Enter old* SANDY ROBERTS, *creeping along the road furtively, keeping in the shadow of the snake fence. He peers over the fence and sees* MAZIE *and* ADAM.)

SANDY:

Hey, younguns, look at me! I hev run away from Esthey's house. Esthey went to the weddin'. She locked me up but I climbed out the winder—(*coming into the lighted place, chuckling over his cleverness. He wears a heavy gray shawl wound about his body like a cocoon.*) He, he, they think I'm crazy but I fooled 'em this time. I climbed out of the winder. I wouldn't hev minded if they'd give me a lamp but they left me in the dark an' things made noises—chairs an' things. So I climbed out the winder—he, he—

MAZIE:

You better go home, Sandy. If Esthey comes back an' finds you gone there'll be trouble.

SANDY (*peering up at the sky*):

Tonight air a night fer weddin's. Thar air so many stars an' sich a sweet smellin' wind with a little touch of rain in it—tears in the mornin'—he, he—tears in the mornin'—

MAZIE (*repeating slowly*):

Tears in the mornin'. You air a funny old man, Sandy. You hev lived a long, long time an' you know lots of things, don't you?

SANDY (*looking quizzically at* MAZIE *and then at* ADAM):

I air rememberin' the time when I was young like you two younguns afore I crossed the plains. He, he, on early Spring nights like this I was aboilin' and yit I was askeered, like you two, standin' apart from each other, wantin' each other, but askeered.

MAZIE:

What air you talkin' about, Sandy? (*She is rather breathless, her fingers pressed under her little left breast. Her heart is struggling like a bird held in the hand.*)

ADAM (*turning fiercely on the old man*):

Shut up, you crazy ol' fool!

MAZIE:

Don't talk like that to him, Adam. He air treated so bad at home.

ADAM:

He talks too much.

SANDY:

Young folks air young folks an' ol' folks air ol' folks. We ol' folks kin only talk. Young folks

don't hev to say nothin'. They jest come together natural-like, like the waves used to come natural-like to Sandy Head when I was a boy, or like autumn leaves come together when wind blows 'em.

MAZIE (*fascinated*):

I wish I could understand the things what you say. I like that—autumn leaves when wind blows 'em—It has a pruty sound like wild bird. (*to* ADAM) Mr. Marshall called me a wild bird, trapped. He said he might come back to open the trap. Tell more, Sandy.

ADAM (*sternly*):

I air goin' to take Sandy home.

SANDY:

No, no, not unless you light a lamp!

ADAM:

I'll light a lamp. Come on.

MAZIE:

Wait, Adam! Let's hev a party—us three! I thought about it this mornin' so I made some little wheat cakes when Aunt Martie was out. I said to myself, 'We'll hev our own weddin' supper, like they air goin' to hev at the hotel.' Thar air some cider in the jug an' some apples in the barrel. We kin make believe it's a whole supper.

SANDY (*smacking his lips*):

Golly, I air hungry. Esthey was in sich a hurry to git ready fer the weddin', she didn't think nothin' 'bout me.

MAZIE (*bubbling over*):

We'll hev it out here under the stars! I'll spread a table cloth on the ground. Won't it be fun? I kin make out I'm the bride like Corie, an' Adam kin be the groom like Milt! (*Darting for the house.*) I'll git the things. You wait here! Oh, what fun—what fun havin' our own weddin' supper! (*She exits into the house.*)

SANDY (*as* ADAM *restlessly walks up to the fence*):

One time, when I whar a young man jest a little older'n you, I saw a Sioux weddin' out on the prairie above Skull Creek. I watched it from behind a big rock. If they'd knowed I was watchin' 'em they'd a scalped me—He, he, but I stayed flat on my belly an' fooled 'em. That wasn't much of a weddin'. The young chief had to catch the gal first. She was a swift runner like a fox. When he caught her he jest threw her over his hoss an'—

ADAM (*wheeling and coming back*):

I'm goin' to take you home!

(*Re-enter* MAZIE *carrying a plate of little wheat cakes and a folded cloth over her arm. In her left hand she carries a brown jug.*)

MAZIE:

Oh, what fun! What fun! Ain't it fun, Adam? (*She spreads the cloth on the ground and places the dish of cakes and jug in the center of it.* ADAM *and* SANDY *stand watching her, both of them fascinated by her bird-like dartings. She stands off and surveys the set of the cloth and the jug and dish upon it.*)

MAZIE:

Don't take off your shawl, Sandy. You'll catch cold.

SANDY (*unheeding her. He puts the shawl around her*):

Thar. That air yer blanket. The ol' chief's darter must be very pruty fer her'n weddin'.

MAZIE:

I kin make believe the red beads.

SANDY:

An' now the ol' chief raises up his arms an' says somethin' to the sky about corn an' rain an' rattlesnakes an' little children fer his darter. (*He raises his arms and his lips move.*)

(MAZIE, *all aquiver, stares at him. The strange mist is again in her eyes.*)

(ADAM, *nervous and breathing heavily, crumbles a wheat cake over the cloth.*)

ADAM (*as the old man seems to work himself into a frenzy, swaying back and forth, muttering unintelligible things*):

Quit it, you ol' fool!

MAZIE (*breathlessly*):

Oh, Adam, don't stop him.

SANDY (*in a sort of chant*):

I air now the drummer—drummin' with a white bone—the rib of a man that died—Thump, thump—thump—thump, thump—(*His left arm rises and falls mechanically.*)

ADAM:

Stop, you ol' fool!

SANDY:

Thump, thump—thump, thump! Like a man's heart beatin' an' a gal's heart answerin'—Thump, thump—thump, thump!

MAZIE (*leaning across the cloth*):

Adam—Adam—like a heart—

SANDY:

Run from him ol' chief's darter—run like a fox afore he catches you. Thump, Thump—thump, thump!

(MAZIE *utters a little hysterical squeal and jumps up. She runs toward the fence into the dark.*)

SANDY:

After her, young chief! Catch the little silver fox who air askeered!

ADAM (*rising*):

You're crazy! Crazy!

SANDY:

After her, young chief. After her. She's your'n. She's your'n.

MAZIE (*calling from the dark*:

Adam! Adam! You can't catch me. You can't catch the little silver fox!

ADAM:

Oh, can't I. Jest you watch out. Oh, can't I. (*He runs into the darkness. His indistinct figure is seen pursuing* MAZIE *for a moment.* MAZIE'S *laughter and* ADAM'S *heavy breathing come out to the old man who sits erect before the cloth, his hand still rising and falling mechanically.* ADAM *catches* MAZIE. *Their figures merge and cling for a moment. There follows a deep pause.*

Then ADAM *breaks away; turns, and dashes up the road and out of sight.*)

MAZIE (*coming slowly down into the light. She stands still for a moment, her finger tips pressed against her mouth. Then she speaks in great wonder*):

Sandy—Sandy—Adam kissed me.

SANDY (*still beating the time*):

Thump, thump—thump, thump.

(THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS.)

ACT 2.

SCENE 1.

SCENE 1.—*The same scene about a month and a half later. A Sunday afternoon in full Spring. A bright sun floods the clearing before the* SLAG *house, the road and the prairie. The prairie is sprinkled with vivid wild flowers.*

MRS. SLAG *is seated in the barrel rocker darning some heavy socks. Bees hum around the tree over the well.* MRS. SLAG *nods. Her darning egg with the sock covering it drops into her lap.*

Enter CORIE *on the road from the right. She carries an empty basket. She walks with little animation. Her mouth has a downward droop.*

CORIE (*irritably*):

Maw, wake up!

MRS. SLAG (*starting up*):

Oh! I did drop off, didn't I? How air you, Corie? You hain't been over fer some days.

CORIE (*sitting down on one of the benches*):

I air fair enough. I walked over to borrer some eggs. Our'n chickens hain't layin', somehow. (*she sighs.*)

MRS. SLAG:

What's the matter, Corie? Hain't Milt provin' a good husband to you?

CORIE:

Oh, Milt's all right. It's that maw of his'n. She drives me crazy. Milt seems to think I oughter love her like I do him. Humph! Sittin' thar

all day with a Bible in her lap, when she could jest as easy be up helpin' with the house-work. I don't believe her leg's bad at all.

MRS. SLAG:

I wouldn't stand fer it a minute, Corie. I'd speak to Milt about it. Train him early, Corie. Don't make the mistake like I did with John. If I'd only taken the whip-hand when we was first married things wouldn't be like they air now. I remember our'n first fight. He threw a dish on the floor an' wouldn't pick it up when I asked him to. I should hev left it thar till he did but like a fool I picked it up. They air all alike, men air. They watch fer a chance an' if you give it to 'em—the least little one—you air a slave to the coffin. (*She rises and puts her darning on a bench*) How many eggs do you need, Corie?

CORIE:

A dozen will do, maw.

MRS. SLAG (*going to the steps of the house*):

Mazie! Mazie!

CORIE:

Last night Milt says he seen Adam Larsen walkin' down by Little Creek in the moonlight. He said he watched him fer a long time an' he was walkin' up an' down, an' then he'd throw stones in the water an' then he'd walk agin.

MRS. SLAG:

He's been sneakin' out after dark! I tol' John I thought I heard him climbin' down the ladder a night or so ago.

CORIE:

I'd watch out fer him comin' from a reform school like he did. He's liable to kill you all when you're asleep.

MRS. SLAG:

He's had a funny light in his eyes lately, I noticed, an' his cheeks look like fever.

(*Enter* MAZIE *from the house. She wears a spring flower, like a white star, caught in her black hair.*)

MAZIE:

Did you call me, Auntie Martie?—Oh, hello, Corie.

MRS. SLAG:

Yes, I called you a long time ago. Git a dozen eggs down the barn fer Corie.

MAZIE (*taking the basket*):

Yes, mam. (*She starts off, then turns*) Oh, Corie, air you happy?

CORIE:

You jest mind your own business an' you'll git along better!

(MAZIE *exits.*)

CORIE:

Nosey little good-fer-nothin'. She allus did want to know too much! What's she wearin' a flower in her hair fer? To git the men folks to look at her? It's her'n maw comin' out in her.

MRS. SLAG:

I didn't see it. My eyes air gettin' bad. I tell John but he wouldn't care if I went blind. She's been singin' all day. Last night she got a letter

from Marshall, that ornery hired man that quit us. I read it. He said he was tryin' to git the trap open. What do you suppose he meant?

CORIE:

I dunno but I told you I heard 'em talkin' by the well early that mornin'.

MRS. SLAG (*hopelessly*):

She'll never come to no good, that's sartain. Them sort of children never do, anyhow. We gave her a good home an' everything but it don't do no good.

CORIE:

Whar's paw?

MRS. SLAG:

Asleep in the house bein' as it's Sunday. He jest come back from camp meetin'. I couldn't go 'cause I had too much work. John says he kin pray enough fer the lot of us. Now, he's all tired out an' cross as a bear. It don't do him no good to go to meetin' an' little *he* prayed!

(MAZIE *re-enters with the eggs.*)

MAZIE:

Red Jinny air settin'. Thar'll be little chicks soon!

MRS. SLAG (*taking the basket*):

Git inter the house an' take that flower out of your'n hair. (*to* CORIE) I'll walk a little ways with you, Corie. (*They exit together going down the road, right.*)

(MAZIE *pauses at the foot of the steps; removes the white flower from her hair and stands twirling it between her fingers.* ADAM *enters from the*

direction of the well. He turns abruptly on seeing MAZIE *and starts to go back the way he has come.*)

MAZIE (*calling impetuously*):

Adam! Adam! Wait!

ADAM:

I-I fergot the spade. (*He is almost off stage.*)

MAZIE (*running to him*):

What's the matter, Adam? (*She puts a tender, seeking hand on his arm.*)

ADAM:

N-nothin'. I-I jest fergot the spade. I hev to git it. (*He turns his head away avoiding her searching, misted glance.*)

MAZIE:

This mornin' at breakfast you wouldn't look at me. You kept your eyes on your plate. You didn't even see that I had one of last night's star-fires in my hair. This one. When I combed my hair last night I found it there, so I put it in water an' kept it fresh fer you to look at this mornin', an' remember how you covered me all over with star-fires. (*proffering him the flower*) Ain't it little an' sweet, Adam?

ADAM (*pushing it away*):

Don't, Mazie—I—I—

MAZIE:

I dreamed about you all night, Adam. Sometimes I was happy—so happy I could sing. Then I would git sad, I don't know why, an' the smell of the star-fires would git too strong. But when you would kiss me like you did last night an'

the first time, when I was the ol' chief's darter, then I was happy agin an' I would sing as high as a willer bird. . .(*her voice soars.*)

ADAM:

Shh, you must not tell anybody about last night. You must not talk about it so loud. We must not go out inter the fields together no more.

MAZIE:

Why not? Is that why you won't look at me?

ADAM:

Yes. It warn't right.

MAZIE:

Not right to kiss?

ADAM:

I hev not forgotten things my mother told me, sittin' by the winder at home. With all bad things I larned in the reform school, I have remembered what my mother said.

MAZIE:

It must be wonderful to remember things your mother said—

ADAM (*firmly*):

We must not go out in the fields at night no more, Mazie. No more in the fields at night! I fergot the spade. I must go an' git it. (*He starts out.*)

MAZIE (*desperately*):

Adam—Adam—everything air so dark, like the well. Tell me things. Tell me what your mother told you.

ADAM (*shaking his head*):

Boys can't tell gals them things.

MAZIE:

Oh, Adam, I air so alone. I was happy last night when I was covered with star-fires. Under them I was cryin'—I did not let you see me—but I was. I was cryin' because I was so happy—because I thought I could not be lonely any more—because I thought you would love me an' tell me things. Now—now—it's—its— (*she turns away; bows her head in her hands and walks up toward the fence.*)

ADAM (*fighting*):

Mazie—little Mazie—I *do* love you—but—but—

(MAZIE *bows herself on the fence*)

ADAM:

Mazie—Mazie—

(*A poignant sob escapes* MAZIE. *It is like a knife stuck in the heart of the boy. He goes to her. He takes her in his arms.*)

ADAM:

Mazie, dear. Dear Mazie, don't cry. I love you, Mazie. I love you. (*throwing back his head*) I won't be askeered. I will speak to John Slag.

MAZIE (*between sharp sobs*):

W-what will you say to him?

ADAM:

I will speak to him!

MAZIE:

Oh, be careful of him, Adam. He air a hard man. He will take the hoss whip to you.

JOHN SLAG (*calling gruffly from the house*):

Martie! Martie!

MAZIE:

That air him now. Oh, I air askeered.

ADAM:

Go inter the house, Mazie. I will speak to John Slag—like a man. (*His shoulders go back.*)

MAZIE:

Adam, I air skeered fer you. (*She throws her arms around him.*)

ADAM:

Mazie, don't you be skeered. (*He kisses her; then gently unlocks her arms from around his waist.*)

JOHN SLAG (*still inside the house*):

Martie! Whar air you, Martie?

ADAM:

Please go, Mazie, an' let me face this—like a man.

(MAZIE *exits, running, around the side of the house.* ADAM *seems to brace himself. His fists clench. His slim, boy body straightens and seems to become taller. He goes toward the door of the house.*)

(*Enter* JOHN SLAG, *his hair ruffled, his eyes red-rimmed from sleep.*)

JOHN SLAG (*viciously*):

Martie! (*He sees* ADAM *standing there, head high with determination.*) Waal, what air *you* wantin'?

ADAM:

Mr. Slag, I air wantin' to ask a favor of you.

JOHN SLAG:

Thar hain't no favors given.

ADAM (*all in one desperate breath*):
Mr. Slag, I air in love with Mazie an' Mazie air in love with me. I want to marry Mazie.

JOHN SLAG (*his cruel eyes glaring*):
What? Say that agin!

ADAM:
I want to marry Mazie.

JOHN SLAG:
Gawd damn you! I've a mind to kill you! (*He raises a great fist.*)

ADAM (*swallowing dryly but standing firm*):
I want to marry Mazie.

JOHN SLAG (*holding the boy by the neck with one hand and putting his other hand, doubled up into a fist, against the boy's face and pressing the knuckles into his cheek as he speaks slowly*):
A baby like you talkin' about gettin' married—A little weak baby talkin' about gettin' married! (*The fist is hurting the boy's cheek. He stiffens his jaw and the cords of his neck tighten.*) Ha, ha! That air funny. A little reform school boy wantin' to git married!

ADAM (*now clinging to* SLAG'S *wrist in the endeavor to push back the fist that is slowly tearing his cheek*):
I air man enough to be plowin' from early mornin' till late at night fer you. I air man enough fer that!

JOHN SLAG:
Yes, an' you'd be droppin' behind the plow if you wasn't skeered o' my hoss whip an' my fist—an' I'll use 'em both if you ever speak about

marryin' Mazie agin! You belong to me. I saved you from the men who was goin' to take you back to whar you really belong. I gev you a good home an' this here air the thanks I git. (*with new fury*) Damn you! Damn you! I've a good mind to push this fist clear through yer face.

ADAM (*squirming as the fist is pressed even tighter*):
Don't—Don't—you're—you're hurtin' me.

JOHN SLAG:
That's the sort of a man you air. The sort of a man who wants to git married. (*Mimicking him.*) You're hurtin' me.

ADAM:
I only want to do the right thing. Mazie don't know nothin'. She don't know the things the boys talked about in the night time when the lights was out. I want to do right things—not bad things.

JOHN SLAG:
You jest try anything! You jest go ahead and try. You stinkin' baby! Jest you try anything! (*He sends* ADAM *sprawling on the ground with a push of his fist. He stands over him.*) Jest you begin any o' yer tricks! Jest you begin.

(*Enter* MRS. SLAG.)

MRS. SLAG:
Oh, John, what's the matter?

JOHN SLAG (*turning on* MRS. SLAG):
You watch out fer that bastard gal. She air foller'n in the footsteps of her'n maw. This here baby air wantin' to marry her. Look at him—

skeered to death—an' wantin' to git married. (*He laughs and digs him with the toes of his heavy boot.*)

MRS. SLAG:

I thought thar was sometin' wrong. Flowers in her hair—an' singin'. Whar air she?

ADAM (*raising himself up*):

Mazie didn't do nothin'. It air all my fault. I done it all. I'm bad. She didn't know nothin'. It air all my fault.

JOHN SLAG:

Shet up! (*to* MRS. SLAG) She air in the kitchen, I reckon. (MRS. SLAG *goes to exit.*)

(*Enter* MILT POLLARD *from the right. He is panting. His face is wet with perspiration.*)

MILT (*wildly*):

Paw Slag, come quick an' help! Our'n barn air on fire! (*He turns and dashes back.* JOHN SLAG, *muttering oaths, follows him.*)

MRS. SLAG:

Oh, my Heavens, everything's happenin' at once! (*She too, follows.*)

(ADAM *raises himself up slowly. He seems dazed. He stands, for a moment, feeling his bruised cheek. Then he runs to the fence and looks off in the direction of the* POLLARD *farm.*)

(MAZIE *enters around the side of the house.*)

MAZIE:

Adam—Adam—did he hurt you?

ADAM:

No, but he'll be hurtin' *you.* We must do somethin'—we must do somethin'——

MAZIE:

Why will he be hurtin' me—because we kissed each other?

ADAM:

Oh, if home wasn't so fer away—if I only had some money—if—if——

MAZIE:

What's it all about, Adam? Jest because we love each other?

ADAM:

I want to do what air right. I want to do what air right.

(*Enter* SANDY ROBERTS *on the road from the left. He leans over the fence and points at them.*)

SANDY:

Psst! Psst!

(ADAM *and* MAZIE *turn about, startled.*)

SANDY:

He, he, I hev been watchin' you from behind the well. I hev had a grand day. I hev been out since sunup. The winder was open. I climbed out an' got my feet nice an' wet on the grass an' through the star-fires. (*He holds up first one bare foot and then the other.*) If I git cold I hain't carin'. He, he. I hev had such a grand day, wanderin' all by myself—(*coming through the fence.*) But now I air tired. I air goin' to sleep tonight! At night ol' folks git tired—but not young folks—He, he, not young folks—he, he——

MAZIE:

Oh, Sandy, we air in trouble.

SANDY:

I know—I know—(*nearer to them*) Tonight air full moon—It air goin' to be light like day on the prairie. Why don't you run away from yer trouble? It air goin' to be a grand night to run away. I know the best nights to run away.

ADAM:

Shall we try it, Mazie?

MAZIE (*excitedly*):

Oh, yes, yes! (*then*) Waal, anything *you* say, Adam.

ADAM (*after a pause of indecision*):

Maybe we kin git home. Maybe we'll be lucky an' git home.

SANDY:

Keep under kiver in the day, Adam. Walk at night but keep under kiver in the day. I'm rememberin' the first time I ran away. I was jest about this high (*indicates with his hand*). I took my dog. I hid till night time in some bushes. I kin remember them bushes. They smelled sweet. Thar was red flowers on 'em. But I had to hold my dog's nose 'cause they made him sneeze an' folks would hear him.

ADAM:

Mazie, I know a thick place in the creek willers. We'll hide thar till night.

MAZIE:

I will take a loaf of bread from the kitchen. You will git hungry, Adam.

SANDY:

He, he, if I was young, I'd go too. Thar hain't no more fun than runnin' away!

ADAM:

An' water from the well, Mazie. You git the loaf of bread an' I'll git the water. Quick! Quick! They'll be comin' back.

SANDY (*up to the fence*):

He, he, the fire air burnin'. The fire air burnin'.

ADAM:

Quick, Mazie! Quick!

MAZIE (*exiting*):

All right, Adam. (*She exits.*)

ADAM:

You won't tell, will you, Sandy?

SANDY (*staring off at the fire*):

They air throwin' water on it—but it won't go out!

ADAM (*exiting toward the well*):

I wonder if luck air with us?

SANDY:

The fire air burnin'—the fire air burnin'—They can't put it out! He, he, they can't put it out!

(THE CURTAIN FALLS)

ACT 2.

SCENE 2

The canvas wall of the Evangelical tent on the outskirts of a small settlement, that evening. Service is going on. A hymn is being sung. The untrained voices of the choir and congregation are accompanied by a small wheezing organ. Moonlight floods the wall of the tent.

THE SINGERS:

"Lead kindly light, amid the encirclin' gloom
Lead Thou me on—
The night air dark an' I air fer from home—
Lead Thou me on—

(ADAM *and* MAZIE *enter from the right, having come across a field. They are rather breathless.* MAZIE *has the sparkle of great adventure in her eyes.* ADAM'S *eyes are full of anxiety. They pause and listen to the singing of the hymn. The voices die away. The organ music stops.*)

ADAM:

Shall we go in, Mazie?

MAZIE:

Jest as you say, Adam.

ADAM:

The preacher might help. If we tell him everything he might help us.

MAZIE:

Anything you want to do, I'll do, Adam.

ADAM:

If we tell him the truth he might help us to git home—or he might marry us—

MAZIE (*taking his hand*):

Let's go in. (*They take a few steps. The voice of the preacher is heard.*)

ADAM:

Listen. (*They pause.*)

(*The preacher's voice is raised high and wrathfully. It is a cracked, coarse voice, ruined by strenuous shouting.*)

THE VOICE OF THE PREACHER:

An' Jesus Christ said, "Ye serpents—Ye hypocrites—Ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of Hell!" And so I say the same to you! You poor ornery sinners sittin' here before me—Hell's flames air leapin' up to you now—burnin' yer feet an' you can't even feel 'em! The stink of brimstone an' Hell's fire air in yer nostrils an' you can't even smell it! Oh, ye serpents! Oh, you hypocrites! Oh, you generation of vipers! Hell's doors air open to you an' you air all walkin' in! Let us pray.

A WOMAN'S VOICE (*high pitched in hysteria*):

Oh! Oh! Oh!

A MAN'S VOICE:

Oh, Lord! Lord! Lord!

ANOTHER WOMAN'S VOICE:

I air a sinner! A sinner! Oh! Oh! Oh!

MAZIE (*clinging to Adam's arm*):

Oh, Adam, I air skeered of him. Let's not go in.

ADAM:

He won't help us. He'll say we air bad. Let's go on, Mazie—across the prairie—toward home.

MAZIE (*pointing out*):

Look, Adam! The star-fires air all like silver under the moon. It will be fun walkin' through 'em—feelin' 'em catchin' agin yer feet.

ADAM (*moving off*):

We must walk fast, Mazie. We must not stop.

MAZIE (*following him*):

Not even—if we git tired?

ADAM (*firmly*):

Not even if we git tired. Come on, Mazie. (*They exit.*)

THE VOICE OF THE PREACHER (*ending the prayer*):

—keep thy sheep, Oh Lord. Amen.

(CURTAIN)

ACT 2.

SCENE 3.

SCENE 3.—*Far out on the prairie, later that same night. A place among big rocks. Off beyond it, out of sight from the audience, is a graveyard, the few stones standing like gray ghosts under the moon. The moonlight touches the tips of the rocks but the base of them is in thick shadow.* THE TRAMP *has lighted a small fire between two small stones. In a tomato can he is cooking soup. He is a ragged, indistinct figure whistling to himself as he breaks up some twigs and adds them to the fire, using one to stir the contents of the can.*

(ADAM *and* MAZIE *come on above him and peer down between the rocks at him. He becomes aware of them and stops whistling.*)

THE TRAMP:

Hello, you, up thar.

ADAM:

Hello. Kin you tell me what town that air, fer off, with all the lights twinklin'?

THE TRAMP:

That air Halifax. Better stay away from thar.

It air full of dogs. (*He continues to whistle and to stir the contents of the can.* ADAM *and* MAZIE *come down to the fire.* MAZIE *holds* ADAM'S *hand. She has put a wreath of star-fires around her head, drawn tightly over the black hair. They stand and watch the tramp for a moment, trying to think of something to say.*)

MAZIE:

Air you a tramp?

THE TRAMP:

I air a member of that order. An' who might you be? The fairy queen?

MAZIE (*smiling and touching the wreath of star-fires*):

Oh—you mean the star-fires. Yes, it air my crown. Ain't it my crown, Adam?

ADAM:

Yes. (*to the tramp*) Do you know whar Ashton air from here?

THE TRAMP (*scratching his head*):

Ashton?—Seems like I do. Air it on the railroad?

ADAM:

No. The railroad air five miles away. You take a stage.

THE TRAMP:

That hain't my way of travel. Ashton? Ashton? No, can't say that I do. You goin' thar?

ADAM:

Yes.

THE TRAMP:

Walkin' all the way?

ADAM:

Yes.

THE TRAMP:

The little gal looks tired. Why don't you stay here an' rest? It'll be better walkin' in the mornin'. I picked this place 'cause it's warm between these rocks. Thar's liable to be a cold wind over the prairie 'fore mornin'. Better stay an' hev some soup. (*He stirs with vigor.*)

MAZIE:

Adam, let's stay. I'm awful tired.

ADAM (*firmly*):

No, Mazie. We must not stop. We must git as fer as we kin tonight. (*to the tramp*) But if you could give her some soup I'd be thankful to you.

THE TRAMP (*bringing out three cups from behind a stone*):

It's Garry's special—Garry's my name. Father was Irish—My mother was Spanish, that's the reason I took to the road. (*He pours the soup into the cups.*)

MAZIE:

An' we'll hev some bread with it. (*She breaks the bread.*)

THE TRAMP:

Thar you air. Smell good?

MAZIE:

Oh, yes. (*She takes her cup. She puts it to her lips.*)

THE TRAMP:

Look out, it's hot.

MAZIE (*sipping*):
Oh, Adam, it air good!

ADAM (*also sipping*):
You bet it air good!

THE TRAMP (*reaching for a bit of bread*):
Set down on the big stone while you're drinkin' it, anyhow.

ADAM:
Umm—Well——(*He sits down.* MAZIE, *with a little sigh, sinks down beside him. For a moment the three sip their soup and say nothing. At last the tramp speaks.*)

THE TRAMP (*to* ADAM):
Air she your sister?

ADAM (*uncomfortably*):
No. (*He blows on the soup.*)

THE TRAMP:
Can't be you two young'uns are married?

ADAM:
We air goin' to git married when we git home—to Ashton.

MAZIE (*breathing it faintly*):
Yes——

THE TRAMP:
Ho, ho, I see! Elopers is what you air! Well, well, thar's romance in the old world yet, I see. That's why I couldn't stay put between four wooden walls. You don't stumble into delicious things between four wooden walls like you do on the road. So you're elopers! An' her with a wreath on her head, as pretty as a fairy! Oh,

my father would hev loved this. He was brought up on fairies, an' my mother's eyes would hev filled with tears, she was that way built. I've seen her weep over crushed eggs in a nest. Elopers! Well, well——

ADAM:

We air not—exactly that.

MAZIE:

We air runnin' away, that air what we air doin'. We hev been very sad—but we air goin' to be happy, in a little while. (*pointing*) Ooh, see the shootin' star!

THE TRAMP:

Yes, it went right over the graveyard, as if it was bringin' somebody thar.

ADAM:

Air that a graveyard?

THE TRAMP:

Yes, an old one. Them air the stones shinin' in the moonlight.

ADAM:

From here they look like sheep.

THE TRAMP (*pensively*):

They air sheep what hev been gathered in. (*to* MAZIE *who sits gazing off, her eyes quite wide*) Finished yer soup?

MAZIE:

Oh, yes. It was good, too. Adam, let's stay here. (*Snuggling down.*) It air warm. Feel the rock. It air warm like a stove from the fire. (*Her head nods.*)

ADAM:

No, no, Mazie. We must go on. (*He collects the uneaten bread.*)

THE TRAMP:

What's the awful hurry, sonny? Air you scared of somethin'?

ADAM:

Yes.

THE TRAMP:

Of what?

ADAM:

Oh—of everything.

THE TRAMP:

That's funny fer a boy. Now if the little gal said that——

ADAM:

You don't understand an' I ain't got time to explain. Come on, Mazie. (*He helps her up.*)

MAZIE:

Oh, Adam, I air—

ADAM:

I know your feet air tired an' I know you air sleepy, but, Mazie, we must go on—

THE TRAMP:

Goodbye, young'uns. You make me think of wild things runnin' from a forest fire like I seen in the North Woods, once.

ADAM:

Thanks fer the soup, sir. If you air ever up Ashton way, come an'——(*drawing suddenly back*)—Who air that, comin' up between the rocks?

THE TRAMP (*looking off*):

Oh, you needn't be afraid of him. He passed here jest afore sundown. He was goin' to the graveyard. He had a kind voice. He stood by the fence of the graveyard fer a long time, till I couldn't see him no more count of the darkness an' the moon hadn't showed yet. One of them gathered-in sheep was his, I reckon. Don't run from him.

ADAM:

We must! We can't meet nobody.

THE TRAMP:

You can't go that way without bumpin' inter him on the path. The rocks on each side of it air thick as forest trees. Go back the way you come.

(ADAM *and* MAZIE *climb the slope again, between the tall rocks. They scurry down the other side of them and loose rocks on the slope are heard tumbling after them. The* TRAMP *whistles, sticking his hands in his pockets. A tall, square figure appears from the direction of the graveyard. It is* GEORGE MARSHALL. *He comes down to the fire. He looks up to the tall rocks where the loose rocks are still slipping down behind the hurried flight of* ADAM *and* MAZIE.)

GEORGE MARSHALL:

Sounds like somethin' wild runnin' down those rocks. Hear it?

THE TRAMP:

Yep. Prairie mice, I guess—or a fox. Have some soup?

GEORGE MARSHALL:

No, thank you. I air goin' on now.

THE TRAMP:

Did you find what you was loinkin' fer?

GEORGE MARSHALL:

Not all.

THE TRAMP:

An' you won't hev no soup? It's good. The young'uns—Waal, anyhow it's good. Garry's special—

GEORGE MARSHALL:

I know it air good an' I'd like to share it with you, but I can't jest now. I'm tryin' to pick up lost threads an' thar's no time to waste, pickin' up lost threads. Goodbye to you, Mister Garry. A pleasant night among the rocks.

THE TRAMP:

Goodnight to you, sir. We'll meet agin sometime, on the road.

GEORGE MARSHALL (*going*):

Yes. I reckon we *all* meet agin sometime—somewhars—(*He goes.*)

THE TRAMP (*making himself comfortable by the fire*):

Wonder what he's wanderin' off on the prairie fer? Pickin' up lost threads—Humm—Sometimes you can—Sometimes you can't—Sometimes thar're too mixed up—broken, some air. (*He curls up and falls to whistling the same air as he whistled in the beginning. Then something makes him straighten up and look off in the direction of the graveyard.*)

THE TRAMP:

Ah, thar they go, runnin' hand in hand. Two little specks like things blowed by wind on the prairie. Past the graveyard—scared, I bet. Little wild things—Elopers—Humm—well, well—(*curling up again*) Little wild things—elopers—elopers in the night—

(*He whistles once more as the curtain slowly falls.*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT 3.

SCENE 1.

SCENE 1.—*The same as Acts* 1 *and* 2. *Five months later. It is now late fall. The tree, over the well, has dropped its leaves. There have been frosts at night. The prairie is brown and brooding, lying like a thing afraid of encroaching winter.*

At the rise of the curtain MAZIE *crosses from behind the house to the well, carrying the wooden water bucket. She walks with her head down, the flower-like tilt to her chin lost. Her movements are no longer bird-like. The wonder of things is still in her eyes but a veil of heavy sadness is drawn across them.*

(ESTHEY KENYON *comes along the road from the left. She goes toward the door of the house.*)

ESTHEY (*calling*):

Mrs. Slag! Oh, Mrs. Slag!

(MAZIE, *about to exit to the well, turns.*)

MAZIE:

Esthey, whar air Sandy? Air he sick?

ESTHEY (*eyeing her coldly up and down*):

No, he air not sick. (*She then deliberately turns her back on* MAZIE. MAZIE *exits.*)

ESTHEY:

Mrs. Slag! Oh, Mrs. Slag, air you thar?

MRS. SLAG (*entering from the house*):

Hello, Esthey. Won't you come in? The air's sharp after the heavy frost.

ESTHEY:

No, thanks, Mrs. Slag. I jest come over to git a lend of that dress pattern you was tellin' me about. Now that harvestin's through, I kin git time to make some new print dresses.

MRS. SLAG:

I air sorry, Esthey, but Corie air usin' it. After she gits through with it you kin hev it.

ESTHEY:

That'll be fine. (*Sitting down on a bench.*) I'll set fer a second. That's a long walk an' paw's sich a worry that I air tired all the time.

MRS. SLAG:

What did you do with him? He hain't been around lately.

ESTHEY:

I keep him locked up in the shed, all the time now. I couldn't keep track of him so Pete an' me put him in the shed. It's nice in thar but he cries an' makes an awful fuss jest like a baby. At night he nearly drives me crazy. If he warn't my father I'd put him away some place but I hate the disgrace of it.

MRS. SLAG (*sighing*):

You an' me hev our'n worries, don't we, Esthey? Here's me on the watch every minute to keep Adam an' Mazie away from each other an' from tryin' to run away agin. I told John, last night, I'd rather send 'em both back to whar they belong an' do all the chores myself than hev things the way they air now. I'm that nervous I could holler.

ESTHEY:

Mrs. Slag, jest what place was it you found 'em that night they run away? I kin never remember the name an' last night I had a wrangle about it with Pete. He sez it was Carston but it wasn't, was it?

MRS. SLAG:

No. It was at High Meadows. They walked all night an' they passed through Carston. That's whar the man seen 'em an' told John. John found 'em settin' beside the road in the high grass eatin' the loaf of bread Mazie stold from me.

ESTHEY (*shaking her head*):

They air bad'uns. Dear me, an' you gev 'em sich a good home, too.

MRS. SLAG:

Waal, you can't expect nothin' else. The boy's from a reform school an' the gal hain't legitimate. I tell John, all the time, to git rid of 'em but he won't. He says they belong to him an' he's a stubborn man.

ESTHEY (*rising*):

Don't tell me! I know men. Hain't I got my hands full with Pete? Oh, Lors, I got to git back.

MRS. SLAG (*walking to the fence with her*):

Feels warmer now. Guess we'll have rain afore night.

ESTHEY:

It does feel warmer an' thar's clouds. (*She starts up the road.*) Goodbye, Mrs. Slag. When Corie

air through with the pattern let me know, if you don't mind.

MRS. SLAG:

I'll let you know, first thing. Goodbye, Esthey.

(ESTHEY *exits.*)

MRS. SLAG (*coming back and looking in the direction of the well*):

Mazie, you leave off lookin' down that well all the time. Draw that water an' come in! I air tired of talkin' to you about that well!

(MRS. SLAG *exits into the house.*)

(MAZIE *returns with the bucket of water. It is heavy for her. She sets it down. She stands with her head bowed.*)

(*Enter* ADAM *running. He limps, slightly.*)

ADAM:

Mazie, I made a short cut across the creek lot. John Slag air comin' the long way. I thought I might git a chance to speak to you afore he gits here. You looked at me so funny-like at breakfast this mornin'.

MAZIE (*with a little, uncontrolled sob*):

Adam—I air so lonely an' I air so skeered.

ADAM (*taking her hand, at the same time glancing apprehensively toward the house*):

Mazie, what is the matter?

MAZIE:

I don't know. I don't know. Sometimes I think I see a light. I think somethin' air goin' to shine like the biggest star—an' then it only gits blacker'n it was afore. Oh, Adam, you don't know

how I cry at night an' try to stop an' shake the bed till I know somebody will hear me.

ADAM (*fearfully*):

W-what is it—do you think—makes you cry at night?

MAZIE (*wonderingly*):

I don't know, Adam—but it air like somethin'—somethin' creepin' on me—in the dark. Somethin' I can't see—somethin' skeery—somethin' I hev never seen afore.

ADAM (*his tongue thick*):

Do—do—you think—do you think——

MAZIE:

What, Adam? Yer hand air tremblin'. What, Adam?

ADAM (*turning away*):

How kin I say it?

MRS. SLAG (*from the house*):

Mazie! Mazie!

MAZIE:

I air comin'. (*to* ADAM) I'll go quick. If she sees us together she will tell Slag an' he will whip you agin like he did when we ran away. He said if he ever whipped you agin he would do more'n hurt yer leg. He said he would kill you. (*She lifts up the bucket.*)

ADAM (*hopelessly*):

I don't care if he does kill me.

MAZIE:

Oh, Adam, don't. An' think of me all alone here—

ADAM:

You was alone afore I came. It was better.

MAZIE (*looking at him with yearning eyes*):

Oh, don't say that.

ADAM (*indistinctly*):

Christ! Christ! (*He exits, running.*)

(*Enter* CORIE *on the road from the right. She walks with determination, a defiant pugnacious lift to her chin. Her eyes are hard and her thin mouth a straight line. She carries a roll of clothing under her arm. She pauses a moment by the fence and looks back toward the* POLLARD *farm. Her head tosses. She turns and comes inside the fence. She is almost to the house when* MAZIE, *who has been watching her, calls to her.*)

MAZIE:

Corie! Corie!

CORIE (*turning sharply*):

Waal?

MAZIE (*crossing to her*):

Kin—kin I ask you somethin', Corie?

CORIE:

You jest go about yer own business. I hev got lots of trouble an' no time to talk with you. (*furiously*) Questions! Questions! Questions! Questions! Can't you see I'm sick? Can't you see I'm ready to holler! Go away from me! (*Sinking on a bench near the house.*) Can't you see I hain't in any condition to listen to fool questions! Oh, Lors, my head. Go way! Go away!

MAZIE (*helplessly drawing back*):

I air sorry. I air sorry your head aches (*pushing back her hair from her brow*). So does mine. An' both our cheeks are red.

(*Enter* MRS. SLAG *from the house.* MAZIE *leans against the fence in the shadow. She looks on, puzzled yet sensing something that will bring the revelation.*)

MRS. SLAG:

Corie. I thought that was you comin' across the field but I warn't sure. I seen you from the winder. Why, what's wrong? You look so— an' them clothes—

CORIE:

I hev left Milt Pollard's house. I will not go back to it agin while that maw of his'n air thar.

MRS. SLAG:

Oh, Corie, what will yer paw say? He will be awful mad.

CORIE:

I do not care. I will not stay under the same roof with that woman. I hate her! I hate her like pizen! (*She begins to cry.*)

MRS. SLAG:

Corie. It must be awful bad. It hain't like you to cry. You air like me. You don't cry so easy. (*She strokes* CORIE'S *forehead.*) Dearie, you air all hot. You hain't well. Corie, don't you feel well?

CORIE:

I hev had a few spells. She got up then an'

wanted to help but I wouldn't let her. I wouldn't let her touch me!

MRS. SLAG:

It air true what you thought then?

CORIE (*wiping her eyes with the back of her hand; then looking at her mother*):

Yes, I air goin' to hev a baby, but I air goin' to hev it here, not at that house whar she air. Come on in, maw, I air cold.

MRS. SLAG (*going into the house with her*):

It air gettin' warmer, like rain, but it air natural fer you to feel cold. (*As they exit*): Hev you felt a stirrin' yet, Corie?

CORIE:

Yes. Night afore last I felt a stirrin'. (*They exit.*)

(MAZIE, *wide-eyed, comes down to the steps. She stands there a moment looking into the house, listening for any further conversation. Then she whirls about, a strange glow of dawning understanding on her face, her lips parted.*)

MAZIE (*whispering*):

A stirrin'—a stirrin' in the night—I know—I know—a stirrin'—a stirrin'—(*calling*) Adam—Adam—I know—I know now what it air! (*She takes a few wavering steps. Her knees give way under her. She falls in a faint on the ground.*)

(ADAM *enters from the well, running. He lifts* MAZIE *in his arms. He turns this way and that, trying to decide what to do. Then he starts in the direction of the well.* JOHN SLAG *enters by the road.*)

JOHN SLAG:
Here thar! What air you doin'?
ADAM:
Mazie has fainted. I air takin' her to the well to git some water.
JOHN SLAG:
Give her to me. You go an' shet up the cows. It air goin' to rain. (JOHN SLAG *takes* MAZIE *who moves in his arms.*)
MAZIE (*coming back*):
Adam—Adam—the stirrin'——
JOHN SLAG:
What air she talkin' about?
ADAM:
I don't know.
JOHN SLAG:
Hurry with them cows. Thar's the first drop of rain. (ADAM *exits.*)
(JOHN SLAG *carries* MAZIE *toward the house. She fights her way back, struggling violently with her arms.*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT 3.

SCENE 2.

SCENE 2.—ADAM'S *room in the attic, a little before dawn, the next morning. It is a bare room with a chuck mattress on the floor in one corner; an old rocker with broken arms, down center; a box for a table, right, on which is a glass lamp with a blackened chimney; a cracked mirror hanging*

on the wall over the box and a rag rug on the floor. Left, in the floor, is a hole through which one climbs on a ladder from the room below. A small window is back center, the roof sloping down on each side of it.

As the curtain rises the room is almost black. Rain is heard on the roof but as the act progresses and dawn struggles in, the rain gradually ceases and only the drip, drip of it from the eaves is heard.

ADAM *is lying on the chuck mattress without the quilt thrown over him. He has not taken off his clothes. He lies flat on his back, his arms stretched out, his eyes open. He has been in this position practically all night. Now, as the feel of dawn is near, he sits up and crawls to the hole in the floor and listens down the ladder. Hearing nothing, he goes to the small window and looks out, remaining there for a moment, trying to pierce the blackness. Then he comes to the box and lights the lamp which gives but a feeble, flickering light and throws the boy's shadow on the wall, the slant of the roof breaking it. The shadow is like a great ogre, hunchbacked. Having lighted the lamp, not knowing why he has done it, he wanders about the room, limping quite noticeably. Once he pauses and studies himself in the mirror. His face is lined and he looks much older. He could easily be taken for a man in the last twenties. Suddenly he hears someone coming cautiously up the ladder. He blows out the light and throws himself once more on the chuck mattress, pulling the quilt*

over him. The steps on the ladder falter, then continue. MAZIE'S *head appears through the hole in the floor. She looks about and whispers.*

MAZIE:

Adam, air you awake? Adam—Adam—

(ADAM *sits up.*)

MAZIE (*stepping up on another rung*):

Air you awake, Adam?

ADAM (*whispering hoarsely*):

Mazie, you must not come up here! Mazie, you must not!

MAZIE:

I've got to, Adam. I've jest got to. (*She scrambles up. Her hair is hanging in a great cloud about her. She seems, in the half-light, to be nothing but a moving cloud of hair.*)

ADAM (*coming to her*):

Mazie, please go down. They will hear you. Something awful will happen if they hear you. Please go down.

MAZIE (*clinging to him*):

I stayed awake all night waitin' fer a chance to come up. Seemed like they never would git to sleep. Auntie Martie turned over an' over. Corie cried a heap. Now she air quiet. They air all quiet. Oh, Adam, I *had* to come an' tell you this—I jest *had* to. Don't turn away from me.

ADAM (*looking fearfully into her face*):

What—is it—Mazie?

MAZIE:

I hev found out why I hev cried at night—an' what it air that air creepin' on me—in the dark.

(*with a little tilt of her chin*) An' I air not askeered, anymore!

ADAM (*bracing himself*):

W-what is it, Mazie?

MAZIE (*trying to see his eyes*):

I air goin' to hev a baby—like Corie air. When I first found out I don't know what happened. The prairie seemed like it turned upside down. Everything got black. I did not know anything. When I came back I was on the floor in the kitchen. Auntie Martie was throwin' water on me. After that, I went around singin', "Little Indian Baby in the Corn," that song of Sandy's. I went around singin' it—Oh, not out loud—to myself, deep down. I was glad. I was glad to know something that they didn't know. I wanted to tell you right away. I wanted you to know—but not them.

ADAM (*through tense lips*):

Jesus—Jesus—

MAZIE:

Why do you talk like that? Why do you say, Jesus—Jesus?

ADAM:

We air bad, Mazie. We air bad.

MAZIE:

Bad? Why air we bad? Tell me—Why air we bad?

ADAM:

I air bad, Mazie—not you. *I* air the bad one. You wasn't to blame. It was me. *I* air the bad one.

MAZIE (*bewildered and speaking in a shrill, quivering voice*):

Bad! Bad! What air bad? Oh, Adam, what air bad? Air little babies bad? Air love bad? Oh, what air bad?

ADAM:

Shh—shh—You will wake them up. You know what will happen if you wake them up.

MAZIE (*hysterical, throwing herself upon him*):

Tell me things! I cannot go on like this. Tell me things!

(*The tarnished silver of a rainy dawn comes through the little window.*)

ADAM:

I cannot tell you things, Mazie. I air all mixed up myself. I don't know what air bad things an' what air good things. I air all mixed up myself.

MAZIE (*like a hunted thing*):

What kin we do, Adam Whar kin we go? Look! It air gettin' light. Kin we try runnin' away agin? Kin we try gettin' home to your maw agin?

ADAM (*hopelessly*):

It hain't no use. They found us afore an' that was in summer when the roads was good. After this rain—we couldn't. You must go down. They will begin gettin' up. Go down, Mazie.

MAZIE (*still clinging to him*):

I cannot, Adam—I cannot——

ADAM:

Please—please go down, Mazie. You must mind me! If you had minded me that night—if we had

gone on without stoppin' to rest—maybe—maybe—Waal, it's too late, now, anyhow. Please—please go down, Mazie.

(*He steps back, away from her. His foot bumps the old rocker and it falls with a clatter to the floor.*)

MAZIE:

Oh!

ADAM:

Ssh!

(*They stand perfectly still, every muscle taut. There is a tense pause broken by the startled voice of* MRS. SLAG *down stairs.*)

MRS. SLAG:

John! John! Did you hear that?

JOHN SLAG (*replying gruffly*):

I air gettin' up to look.

CORIE'S VOICE:

It sounded like something fallin' in the attic, maw.

(*Another pause. Footsteps are heard crossing the floor down stairs.*)

MRS. SLAG:

John! Oh, John! Mazie air gone out of her bed! John! They hev run away agin!

CORIE:

Look in the attic, paw!

(ADAM *and* MAZIE *run to the chuck mattress. They throw themselves down.* ADAM *is quite covered by* MAZIE'S *hair.*)

MRS. SLAG:

Kin you find the lantern, John?

JOHN SLAG:

I hev lit it.

(*Heavy steps are heard on the ladder rungs.* MAZIE *and* ADAM *draw closer together.* JOHN SLAG'S *great hand appears through the hole, holding a lantern. His head and his bull-like neck and huge shoulders follow. For a moment he blinks and stares about him. His shadow almost fills the room. Then he sees* ADAM *and* MAZIE *huddled on the mattress.*)

JOHN SLAG (*bellowing*):

Straight to Hell with you both! (*He fairly leaps up the remaining ladder rungs and stands on the attic floor.*)

MRS. SLAG (*on the first ladder rung*):

Air they thar, John?

JOHN SLAG:

They air here! (*He stands glaring at them, a slow, cruel smile broadening on his lips. He is gloating over them, his hammer-like fists tightly clenched. The lantern flickers at his feet.*)

ADAM (*trying to find words*):

Mr. Slag—Mr. Slag—

JOHN SLAG:

Shet your mouth.

(*He advances on them.* ADAM *springs up and stands before* MAZIE.)

ADAM:

Don't hurt her. She hain't to blame. It's me that air bad. I knew all the bad things. Mazie didn't know nothin'. Don't hurt her!

JOHN SLAG:

Shet yer mouth, I tell you! (*He hits him.* ADAM *reels; catches himself and stands swaying.*

MAZIE *whimpers and rolls up in a little ball on the mattress.*)

JOHN SLAG (*to* MAZIE):
You git up an' go down stairs.

(MAZIE *rises.*)

MRS. SLAG (*her head appearing through the hole*):
What did I allus say? She air another like her maw!

JOHN SLAG (*taking a strand of her hair in his fist and crumpling it*):
I'd like to hang you by your'n hair, you slut! Maybe I will, on the tree over the well, after I'm done with him (*indicating* ADAM).

MAZIE (*suddenly dropping to her knees*):
Dear God in the sky—don't let him—don't let him hurt us—

JOHN SLAG (*raising his fist above her bowed head*):
Shet up—damn you!

ADAM (*jumping forward in an attempt to stop the fist from falling on* MAZIE'S *head*):
Don't hurt her! Don't hurt her! She air goin' to hev a baby. Don't hurt her!

MRS. SLAG:
Oh, Lors! Lors!

JOHN SLAG (*in a terrible voice*):
Go down stairs! Both of you go down stairs!

MRS. SLAG (*disappearing*):
I allus said no good could come from either of 'em. I allus said it. (*She exits.*)

(MAZIE *silently goes to the ladder and climbs down out of sight.*)

ADAM (*as he follows her*):

I wanted to marry her. You wouldn't let me. I knew the bad things—an' an' she didn't. I wanted—I wanted—

JOHN SLAG:

Go down stairs!

(ADAM *climbs down the ladder. The dead silver of dawn brightens.* JOHN SLAG *stands clenching and unclenching his hands. Because of the sloping roof he stoops from the waist. His arms dangle down. In that small room he looks like some colossal, half-beast man. Slowly his cruel smile widens. He turns toward the ladder.*)

(THE CURTAIN FALLS)

ACT 3.

SCENE 3.

SCENE 3.—*The outside of the house again, about ten minutes later. Beyond the prairie the dawn is a jagged rent of silver in the gray cloth of the sky. The wet earth is black. The eaves of the house drip water. Before the curtain rises the blows of a raw-hide whip are heard falling on a human body.*

The curtain rises and in silhouette against the silver rent of dawn, JOHN SLAG *is seen standing over* ADAM *who lies on the ground.* JOHN SLAG'S *arm is raised to strike once more.* MRS. SLAG *and* CORIE *stand on the steps of the house.*

MRS. SLAG (*fearfully*):
John, you air killin' him.
CORIE:
He hain't makin' any more noise.
MRS. SLAG:
You better stop, John. You don't want to kill him.
CORIE:
They'll jail you, paw.
JOHN SLAG:
Shet up! I know what I'm doin'.
(*His arm drops down. He prods* ADAM *in the ribs with the toe of his boot.* ADAM *does not move.*)
JOHN SLAG:
Yes, I reckon you've got enough.
MRS. SLAG (*coming down the steps*):
He's senseless, hain't he?
JOHN SLAG (*stooping over him*):
Yes.
CORIE:
You're sure it hain't nothin' worse?
JOHN SLAG (*rising*):
An' if it is? Don't he belong to me? Can't I do what I want with him?
MRS. SLAG:
You can't kill anybody, John.
(MAZIE, *who has only been held back by the women at the door, now enters running from the house. She hurls herself down beside* ADAM *and takes his head in her lap.*)
MAZIE:
Adam—Adam—my boy—Adam—

MRS. SLAG:

We told you to stay in the house!

MAZIE (*unheeding*):

Adam—Oh, you air cold, Adam!

(*The rent over the prairie becomes wider and more light.*)

JOHN SLAG (*putting his hand on* MAZIE'S *shoulder*):

Leave him be! (ADAM'S *head stirs in* MAZIE'S *lap.*)

ADAM (*in a voice that comes from far off*):

Air this star-fires—under my head—or air it—Mazie's lap?

CORIE (*with relief*):

He air speakin'. He air not dead.

(JOHN SLAG *takes his hand from* MAZIE'S *shoulder.*)

MAZIE:

It air Mazie's lap, Adam.

ADAM:

Oh, Mazie—little Mazie—We kin git home, now—to my mother. See how fast we air goin'—over the prairie—walkin' through the star-fires an' the long grass. They can't catch us—this time. No! Don't stop—please don't stop—Mazie, air he heavy? Let me carry him, Mazie—He air mine like he air your'n. Oh, he air light—light—Look Mazie—that air it—that air it—

MAZIE (*bending over him*):

What, Adam?

ADAM:

Home—the winder—Here's the field whar I used to plow—Thar's Sport—my dog—He's comin' to meet me—Hello, Sport—Down, Sport—

MAZIE:

Adam—Adam—

ADAM:

Look—look—Thar's maw—sittin' on her hair, jest like a little queen—Maw! Maw! Here's Mazie! Mazie—an' him—our'n baby—Mazie, meet maw. Don't she kiss like a little queen? She air a queen—sittin' in—the winder—on her'n hair. Look, Mazie, how she holds him. She air glad—She air glad—She knows what air good—the little queen—

(*Blood rushes from his mouth. His head rolls down in* MAZIE'S *lap. He dies. The dawn opens out like a great silver window.*)

MAZIE (*piteously*):

Adam—my Adam—

CORIE (*shrilly*):

You hev killed him, paw!

MAZIE:

Adam—speak some more—

JOHN SLAG (*bending over the boy and then drawing back*):

I didn't mean to kill him. I jest wanted to make him sorry fer what he done. I didn't mean to kill him. You know that, Martie—Corie—I didn't mean to kill him! (*attempting to control himself*) Waal, anyhow, he deserved it—wrongin' a little gal—a little gal who didn't know nothin'! He deserved killin'—even if I didn't mean to do it—wrongin' a poor little gal. Git up, Mazie. We won't hurt you. Git up, Mazie. Wrongin' a poor little gal like you—(*He raises her gently.*)

MAZIE:

Let me go—please—

(*Something in the dead tone of her voice makes* JOHN SLAG *take his hands from her. She silently walks away in the direction of the well.* JOHN SLAG, MRS. SLAG *and* CORIE *look after her. She exits slowly, her hair hiding her face.*)

CORIE:

Don't let her go away alone like that.

MRS. SLAG:

She air stoppin' by the well. She allus liked that well. Let her stay thar fer awhile.

CORIE:

Sun's comin' up. Oh, I can't look at him!

JOHN SLAG:

We've got to put him some place. Whar kin we put him? Nobody'll know nothin' about him. He belonged to me. I took him from the reform school. I gev him a good home an' what did he do? He wronged a little gal. Whar kin we put him? Nobody'll know.

(*Enter by the road, from the left,* GEORGE MARSHALL. *He wears a raincoat over a suit of cheap store clothes. He leans on the fence and looks at the group.*)

CORIE:

Thar's thick places in the willers.

JOHN SLAG:

No. The creeks air risin'.

MRS. SLAG (*suddenly seeing* MARSHALL):

John, somebody air watchin' us from the fence. Oh, John, it air that hired man, George Marshall!

JOHN SLAG (*trying to hide* ADAM'S *body by stepping in front of it*):

What do you want here, George Marshall? You air not wanted on this here farm.

GEORGE MARSHALL (*coming slowly in through the fence*):

I air wantin' to see Mazie.

JOHN SLAG:

She air not here. She air gone away. You git along now. We hev a sick boy here. He air fainted an' I air takin' him inter the house. You go along now. (*He lifts up* ADAM'S *body.*)

GEORGE MARSHALL (*seeing the raw-hide whip on the ground*):

You hev been usin' the hoss whip on this boy, John Slag, like you tried to use it on me!

JOHN SLAG:

I hev not. You git along an' mind yer own business if you know what air good fer you.

(*He walks toward the house.*)

GEORGE MARSHALL (*following him*):

You let me see that boy!

CORIE:

You git out of here!

MRS. SLAG:

Git out! (*She snatches up the raw-hide whip.*)

GEORGE MARSHALL (*getting his hand on the boy's damp head*):

Great God! You've beaten him to death!

(MRS. SLAG *rushes at him with the whip.*)

GEORGE MARSHALL (*wresting it away from her*):

You she-devil! You've helped him. I'll hev the

lot of you strung up fer this! (*with sudden fear*) Whar's Mazie? Hev you killed her, too? Whar air she?

JOHN SLAG (*putting the body of* ADAM *on the ground*):

It whar because he wronged Mazie that I whipped him. I jest did it to skeer him fer wrongin' Mazie. I didn't know it would kill him—

GEORGE MARSHALL:

Whar air she? What hev you done to her?

CORIE:

She went over thar to the well. (*looking off*) Thar she air. No, that air Sandy Roberts lookin' down the well. How did he git out?

GEORGE MARSHALL (*half to himself as he takes a few steps toward the well*):

That well—I remember—she said it was round like the world. It was awful black—but sometimes she saw stars in it—I wonder if she saw my face?

(*Enter* SANDY. *His clothes are wet. His hair is wildly ruffled. His bare feet are caked with mud.*)

SANDY (*his eyes burning*):

Mazie has jumped down the well! Mazie has jumped down the well!

GEORGE MARSHALL (*grasping* SANDY'S *arm*):

What air you talkin' about?

SANDY:

I seen her jump. I was goin' to surprise her an' tell her how I got out of the barn an' was

in the rain all night. He, he, it was grand bein' in the rain all night—

GEORGE MARSHALL (*pushing him aside*):
Is it too late to save her?

(*He exits running to the well.*)

SANDY (*looking after him*):
You'll not see her. It air dark down thar—darker'n the shed.

JOHN SLAG:
Shet up!

(JOHN SLAG, MRS. SLAG *and* CORIE *have instinctively drawn together and are all staring off toward the well.*)

GEORGE MARSHALL'S VOICE (*calling frantically down the well*):
Mazie! Mazie!

SANDY (*seeing the body of* ADAM):
What air the matter, young chief? Young chief, you can't catch her now. It air too late. You won't even see her. She air lost—down the well. It air dark down thar. She won't like it. She liked stars an' the moon—Git up, young chief—Git up—

GEORGE MARSHALL (*re-entering*):
I can't see her. (*pointing a finger at the group*) I don't know the truth of this, but I'll find out! You'll hang, John Slag! (*The* SLAG *family cower under* MARSHALL'S *accusing finger*) She was given inter your'n hands an' she could hev loved you—Oh, how she could hev loved you—like her'n maw could love. Her'n maw—(*almost breaking*).

She was mine an' I didn't know—I didn't know—(*His head thrown fiercely back*). Oh, Lord, forgive me that day—that day I would not give my name—an' from that day she walked in the dark—an' her'n baby walked in the dark. (*Tears stream down his cheeks. He strikes his breast with his two fists.*) Oh, why air life and man so cruel? (*The sun begins to rise above the straight line of the prairie. The wet soil glistens. Birds in the tree over the well begin to sing.*)

SANDY:

Young chief, git up! The sun air risin'. The sun air risin'. Foller the little silver fox over the prairie! She air runnin' fast—right inter the sun!

GEORGE MARSHALL (*his head still flung back*):

The sun air risin'—The sun air risin'—too late—too late—

(THE CURTAIN FALLS)

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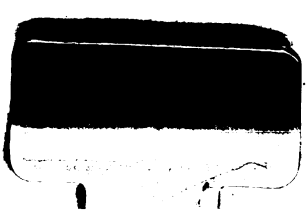
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